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Citation: Cook, Ian and Ward, Kevin (2012) Relational comparisons: the assembling of Cleveland's waterfront plan. *Urban Geography*, 33 (6). pp. 774-795. ISSN 0272-3638

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.33.6.774> <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.33.6.774>>

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Relational comparisons: The assembling of Cleveland's waterfront plan

Forthcoming in *Urban Geography*

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Abstract: This paper uses the ongoing attempts to redevelop the Cleveland waterfront to reveal the relational comparative geographies that are present in a number of contemporary urban revalorization strategies. It draws on archival papers, semi-structured interviews, and the local grey literature to make three contributions to the existing urban-global studies literature. First, the paper argues that many contemporary waterfront and other similar redevelopment schemes are inherently comparative, with a significant amount of seemingly territorial politics and urban policy making characterized by actors' engagements with places elsewhere. Second, it shows that the framing of urban policy through relational comparisons is an established practice in many cities and that current redevelopment plans should be understood as informed by previous rounds of relational and territorial policy making. Third, it points to the importance of consultants in the current era – as examples of actors of transference – in shaping not only redevelopment plans but also the framing of the city in relation to other cities.

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No one public improvement is more important to the City of Cleveland than the development of her lake front in accordance with the best possible plan
(Hopkins, 1927, p. 21)

What we do with our great assets ... will reshape Cleveland for decades to come
(Jackson, 2010, quoted in Breckenridge, 2010, n.p.)

The regeneration of urban waterfronts is one of the key urban design and planning stories of the late twentieth century (Dovey, 2005, p. 9)

INTRODUCTION

Dan Moulthrop hosts the *Cleveland Ideas* show on WCPN, Cleveland's largest public radio station. In July 2009 he chaired an on-air roundtable discussion on the subject of the city's redevelopment of the waterfront. Four guests – Jill Akins (Van Auken Akins architects), Eric Johnson (Port of Cleveland), Bob Brown (City of Cleveland) and Christopher Diehl (Kent State University) – discussed Cleveland's past, present and future relationship with its port and waterfront. Much of the discussion was positive, and much of it was territorial. Issues such as the role of different city and regional stakeholders, the costing of the different aspects of the strategy, the role of public and green space in the proposals, and connectivity between the downtown and the waterfront were discussed, both by panelists and by those who phoned into the show. This was to be expected. However, much of the discussion was also about other cities and other waterfronts, some not too far geographically from Cleveland, others considerably further away. A range of examples were invoked by the panelists. Cleveland was compared with other cities, favorably at times, unfavorably more often than not. Reference was made to learning from the successes and failures of other cities. All kinds of experiences, expertise and knowledge were marshaled to reinforce, justify and substantiate the particular envisioning process indulged in by those leading the Cleveland waterfront strategy. There was talk of various technologies of comparison, such as city audits, league tables, and key performance indicators as comparison and learning became intertwined in a discussion over the future of Cleveland and its waterfront.

Of course, the territorial component to ‘urban’ politics and policy has been the intellectual cornerstone of work in the social sciences over the last thirty years (Harvey, 1985, 1989; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Cox and Mair, 1988). Accounts have tended to focus on the territorial nature of politics and on issues such as consumption, development, infrastructure, investment, marketing, and production. This work has been hugely insightful and influential, and quite rightly so, producing a long lineage of important works. While at times there has been some acknowledgement of the problematic and temporarily ‘fixed’ nature of the ‘urban’ (Harvey, 1982; Cox, 2001), nevertheless, by and large this work has emphasized the territorial nature of ‘urban’ politics and policy. More recently a series of alternative contributions have sought theoretically, methodologically and empirically to extend this earlier work through considering the relational geographies that often underpin territorial political expressions (K. Ward, 2006, 2007; Cook, 2008; Cook and Ward 2011, 2012; McCann, 2008, 2011; McCann and K. Ward, 2010; 2011; Peck 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010a, 2010b; Robinson, 2011). One way this has been done is through attending to the ‘interlocal policy networks, facilitated by a sprawling complex of conferences, websites, consultants and advocates, policy intermediaries and centers of technocratic translation, the combined function of which is to establish new venues and lubricate new channels for rapid [urban] ‘policy learning’” (Peck, 2005, p. 767-768).

Taking its lead from this recent set of intellectual endeavors, the focus in this paper is on Cleveland’s waterfront development and the way other cities were drawn upon comparatively and relationally in the designing and the legitimizing of the 2009 plan. The city of Cleveland exemplifies the challenges faced by many former industrial cities. How to respond to changing economic circumstances? How to make best use of its port and its waterfront? We don’t argue that Cleveland is either unique or exemplary. Rather, we present an approach to studying this city that points to how other cities might

usefully be studied in the future. Of course, there is already quite a bit known about Cleveland *qua* Cleveland (Krumholz, 1982; Keating, 1996; Warf and Holly, 1997; Chakalis *et al.*, 2002; Wilson and Wouters, 2003; Hirt, 2005; Keating *et al.*, 2005; Lowe, 2008). We draw upon this illuminating and important work. This paper does though take a different approach; it is less concerned with either the specifics of the plans or the territorial politics around them, both of which are, of course, not unimportant. Rather, the paper is particularly interested in the reference points and comparisons embodied in recent plans to redevelop Cleveland's waterfront. It considers the different ways in which the redevelopment of the waterfront makes reference to places elsewhere. Of course, there are a number of histories of trans-urban exchange and learning, particularly around the notion of 'best practice' (see, for instance, S. Ward, 2008). The paper argues that the current era differs from its predecessors not only in terms of the range and type of actors involved in 'moving' and 'fixing' policies, but also in terms of the nature of the relationships between cities and the context in which they operate.

As this paper will explain, this learning – 'that is the acquisition of knowledge which is then tested, converted and used to make change, and stored for future use' (Campbell, 2008, n.p.) – has occurred in two ways. First, incoming members of the 'global policy consultocracy', to use the words of McCann (2011, p. 114), have been involved in the production, dissemination and legitimization of the waterfront plans. Some have written supporting documents; other have simply turned up and presented their 'truths'. They have worked alongside 'local' policy actors to shape the city's redevelopment trajectory. Second, various 'local' and 'extra-local' urban actors – consultants, planners, politicians, and practitioners – have used comparison as a strategy to underscore the importance to Cleveland of redeveloping the waterfront in a particular way. The city has been *positioned*, across space – against other cities – and across time – against what other cities have already achieved (Nijman, 2007).

To address these issues, the paper draws on semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders in the public and private sectors in and beyond the city of Cleveland. These interviews explored territorial issues of consultation, governance, and ownership, but also asked interviewees about comparisons, policy models, reference points and study tours. These were supplemented by the use of extensive archives from local libraries and secondary grey materials such as city plans, consultancy presentations, and city newspaper articles. The paper is organized into three sections. First, the paper provides a necessarily brief overview of the literatures on comparative urban studies, on the one hand, and on policy transfer, on the other. It argues that many contemporary waterfront and other similar redevelopment schemes are inherently comparative, with a significant amount of urban politics and urban policy-making characterized by actors' engagements with places elsewhere. Second, the paper analyses past attempts to redevelop Cleveland's waterfront as a means of setting the context for the production and circulation of the 2009 plan. In the third section the paper turns to the assembling of this document and the various 'local' and 'extra-local' actors whose movements in and out of the city were important in shaping the debates and discussions. In the conclusion the paper argues for a careful tracing of the pathways taken by mutating 'models', the circuits, networks and webs in and through which the 'models' travel and of the actors involved in both their mobilization and territorialization.

WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONAL COMPARISONS:

MOBILE POLICIES, MOBILE PEOPLE

Since the late 1970s a large and intellectually diverse body of work has been produced on the changing political economies of North American and Western European cities.

Specific attention has been focused on the ways in which capital and the state have worked together in different types of institutional arrangements to oversee a transformation in the ways in which cities are governed (Cox and Mair, 1988; Jessop *et al.*, 1999; Valler and Wood, 2004). Writing over two decades ago, Harvey (1989, p. 4) stated that we had witnessed the emergence of ‘a general consensus... throughout the advanced capitalist world that positive benefits are to be had by cities taking an entrepreneurial stance to economic development’. For Brenner and Theodore (2002, p. 368) this consensus constituted the urbanization of neo-liberalism, as urban space was mobilized ‘both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices’.

Within this wider field there is a voluminous literature on waterfront redevelopment (Breen and Rigby, 1994; Malone, 1996; Marshall, 2001; Dovey, 2005; Wakefield, 2007). On the one hand, such developments are presented as yet more high-profile attempts to kick start urban economies through the reclaiming and repackaging of ‘dead’ zones (Doron, 2000) and ‘left over spaces in the city’ (Marshall, 2001). They are one of a suite of strategies, often partnership-based, aiming to revalorize areas of urban space through residential and consumption-led redevelopment, hopefully integrating the city ‘into ... international property and financial market[s] and/or global socio-cultural networks’ (Lehrer and Laidley 2009, p. 798). On the other hand, studies have shown that contemporary waterfront and port development is wrapped up in a number of distinctive cultural, ecological, economic, political and social processes. These processes that have not only altered the post-war workings of commercial and naval ports but have ‘opened up’ redundant port spaces, as well as undermining the traditional employment and economic opportunities that ports seemed to offer to their surrounding city-regions. Major changes have included: the standardization of ‘roll on, roll off’ containerization and the increasing size of shipping vessels, the switching of capital to commercial ports

downstream, the contraction of port employment, and the influence of national military strategies and cut-backs on naval port cities (Baird, 1996; Smith and Pinder, 1997).

Dovey (2005), meanwhile, points to the socially constructed iconography of water and the post-industrial waterfront, which is shaped in part by the city marketing campaigns that stress the aesthetic and physiological qualities of living, playing and working 'by the sea'. This socio-cultural aspect is particularly important as cities seek to capitalize on the symbolic value of the waterfront.

Although it has its intellectual home in planning, this waterfront literature increasingly transcends disciplinary boundaries and has interrogated a wide range of issues bound up in the redevelopment of 'disused industrial land related to former port uses' (Dovey, 2005, p. 9). These issues range from planning procedures (Dovey 2005; Cowan and Bunce, 2006) to sustainable design and political-ecological consequences (Bunce and Desfor, 2007; Laidley 2007; Bunce, 2009), from land reclamation (Norcliffe *et al.*, 1996) to governance and management (Bassett *et al.*, 2002; Desfor and Jørgenson, 2004), from leisure and gentrified residential developments (Wakefield, 2007) to struggles and resistance over future development (Lehrer and Laidley 2009; Scharenberg and Bader, 2009). A rich range of empirical cases from Barcelona to Toronto, Shanghai to Baltimore have shown quite how widespread urban waterfront redevelopment has become.

This work is clearly not without its insights. Nevertheless, a number of important theoretical questions are raised by the pursuing of waterfront redevelopment strategies in so many different localities around the world over the last thirty-five years or so. These are questions about relations beyond cities, 'on the 'external' linkages among cities – nationally, regionally, and globally – and between urban policy actors and global circuits of policy knowledge' (McCann and K. Ward, 2011, p. xix). These include: how is

it that so many geographically discrete cities have ‘chosen’ to redevelop their waterfront, often along remarkably similar lines? In what ways do cities with waterfronts learn from each other? Who is involved in the transference and reproduction of waterfront redevelopment from one city to another?

It is our contention that these questions can begin to be addressed through working through two discrete but overlapping set of literatures that both in their own ways seek to grapple with how best to conceive of cities and the relationships between them. The first is on comparative urban studies. This has a long lineage in the social sciences (K. Ward, 2008, 2010; McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011). Comparing one city with another, looking both for similarities and/or differences, this literature has sought to balance specific individual details with general, system-wide tendencies. While this work has generated a series of insights, more recently it has been subject to a series of critiques by human geographers, most noticeably around the way in which it conceives of cities as closed, bounded entities (Robinson, 2006, 2011; Nijman, 2007; M. Smith, 2009; K. Ward, 2008, 2010; McFarlane, 2010). The second literature is that on the making mobile of policies. This political science dominated literature has sought to reveal how policies are transferred from one country to another. Using notions of ‘diffusion’, ‘dissemination’ and ‘learning’ this work has generated a series of insights into how crime, economic development, education, environmental, housing and welfare policies are moved from one country to another and with what consequences (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Evans 2004; Stone 2004; Jones and Newburn, 2007). As McCann and K. Ward (2010, p. 177) note, it ‘focuses on modeling how transfer works, creating typologies of ‘transfer agents’... and identifying conditions under which transfer leads to successful or unsuccessful policy outcomes in the new location’. However, this literature also suffers from a number of limits. Two are particularly important in the context of this paper: first, this work tends to over-emphasize the centrality of the national scale, and, second,

it often fails to consider the sheer multitude of actors involved in what Peck and Theodore (2001, p. 449) call the ‘complex, selective and multilateral’ process of ‘transfer’ (McCann, 2011).

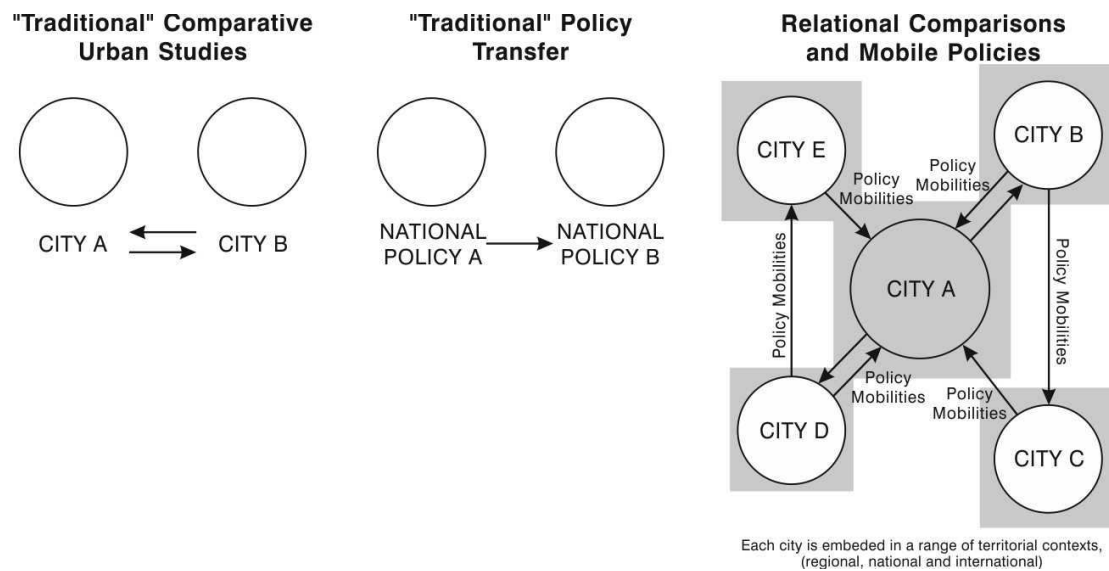


Fig 1. Cities in a relational comparative context

Figure 1 represents the dominant ways in which cities have been compared with each other on the one hand (city A and city B) and national policy transferred on the other (national policy A to national policy B). This paper takes these as its points of departure but proposes a relational comparative framework, as depicted in the third example. It rests on five principles. First, it draws on and extends Nijman’s (2007, p. 93) ‘multiple individualizing comparisons’. The primary focus is on one city in this paper – Cleveland (City A in the third section of Figure 1) – but with comparisons to a number of other cities, not one. Second, the selection of these cities is about mapping existing inter-connections and networks, about following policy and practice and seeing where they lead. This distinguishes it from the sort of comparative framework that tends to characterize much of the existing literature. Third, the notion of ‘policy transfer’ is

much broader than how the term is used in the political science literature. In this it can be quite ‘literal’ (McCann, 2011). Rather, here ‘policy’ is understood in a broader sense, as sets or bundles of expertise, learning and knowledge codified in one way or another into policy form, while ‘transfer’ is not a one off, disembodied movement from one country to another but rather includes all aspects of the making mobile of the ‘policy’. Analytically this begins to open up the ‘blackbox’ of how policy is constituted. Fourth, cities are understood as open and internally differentiated, temporarily assembled and given coherence but constituted in and through circuits, networks and webs of varying geographical reach. Fifth, cities are still understood territorially, anchored and embedded in various spatial contexts that both empower and constrain them. Taken together we believe this constitutes a refined approach to conceiving of the ways in which cities are compared and relate to one another, and one that allows us to study the city of Cleveland’s recent waterfront redevelopment strategy, to which this paper now turns.

CLEVELAND AND ITS WATERFRONT: RELATIONAL AND TERRITORIAL GEOGRAPHIES

Like other rust-belt powerhouses of old, Cleveland neglected its lakefront and river banks for generations, viewing them as grimy tools for industrialists or playthings for the wealthy – and very little else (Litt, 2001, np)

OVERVIEW

The last four decades have been hard on the city of Cleveland. As Warf and Holly (1997, p. 209) note, ‘Cleveland in the 1970s and 1980s embodied the worse aspects of the Rustbelt: deindustrialization, population loss, rising poverty, ugly landscapes and a notoriously poor reputation’. The numbers are quite staggering. Between 1950 and 1990 the city’s population almost halved, falling from 914,808 to 506,616 (Lowe, 2008). It currently has a population of just under 440,000 (Cleveland City Planning Commission, 2008). Rundown neighborhoods, boarded up houses, and poorly maintained public spaces remain visible signs of the how the city continues to suffer, despite attempts to reclaim this land as part of a re-imagining of the city (Cleveland City Planning Commission, 2008). Those in employment fell by a third between 1979 and 1993, and the figures today remain below national averages (Warf and Holly, 1997). By the mid 1990s almost thirty percent of those living in the city of Cleveland lived below the official poverty line (Glickman *et al.*, 1996). Over the same four decades the racial profile of Cleveland was transformed, as the ‘black’ population rose from 16% to 44% of the City’s total. As Krumholz (1982, p. 164) put it, ‘the poor were more often than not black, the black were more often than not poor.’

While the city might have gone from being known as the ‘mistake on the lake’ in the 1970s to the ‘comeback city’ in some people’s eyes during the mid 1990s, this discursive transformation did not reflect changes in the real economy. Despite the protestations of the city’s growth coalition – involving elected officials, senior figures in the local media, the Greater Cleveland Partnership (civic and business leaders), and others – and its attempts to re-make and re-brand the city’s image (Wilson and Wouters 2003), many of these features of the 1970s economic and social landscape remain largely unchanged. Thus so do the challenges facing the variety of public and public-private agencies overseeing the city’s future development, and in particular, how to manage ‘the

use of Cleveland, Ohio's, fourteen mile lakefront on Lake Erie' (Keating *et al.*, 2005, p. 129). It is to this that the paper now turns.

REDEVELOPING THE CLEVELAND WATERFRONT: THE EARLY YEARS

After more than a century of plans and debates, Cleveland has yet to develop an accepted balance between public uses and private development. Until this occurs, the lakefront remains a place where priorities are unclear and frustration abounds among all of the concerned interest groups (Keating *et al.*, 2005, p. 152).

As a port city, the relationship between the waterfront and the rest of Cleveland has always been an important one. It once marketed itself as one of the 'great seaports of the world', comparing itself with others such as Hong Kong, Liverpool and Rotterdam, Cleveland was nevertheless a different sort of port to those it compared itself with (see Figure 2). The bulk of its tonnage has always been domestic as opposed to international, and most of its business has been handling inbound rather than outbound steel and heavy machinery (Ehle, 1996). Currently consisting of eight international cargo docks on 110 acres of land alongside Lake Erie, according to latest data the Port Authority handles 12.5 million tons of cargo per annum, 95 percent of which is 'dry bulk' (grain, limestone etc.) as opposed to 'break bulk' (packaged materials) (www.portofCleveland.com). A number of initiatives have sought to increase trade through the port over the years, and to use it as a catalyst for economic growth in the city – from the setting up of a Port Authority in 1968 to the establishment of Foreign Trade Zones in 1978 (Ehle, 1996). While various reports have pointed to the multi-million

pound trade and investment that the port facilitates in the surrounding areas (Blossom, 1977), the evidence is that the port and the wider economies of which it is part seem to be diminishing in importance locally, raising questions over how to develop other economic activities in the city.

Under these economic conditions a local consensus of sorts emerged in the 1980s that the port would have to be augmented by new service-based industries. Furthermore, as George Voinovich, the City Mayor between 1980 and 1989, argued, and unlike his predecessor Dennis Kucinich who famously opposed the creep of neo-liberalization (Krumholz, 1982), the city needed to develop a new entrepreneurial mentality:

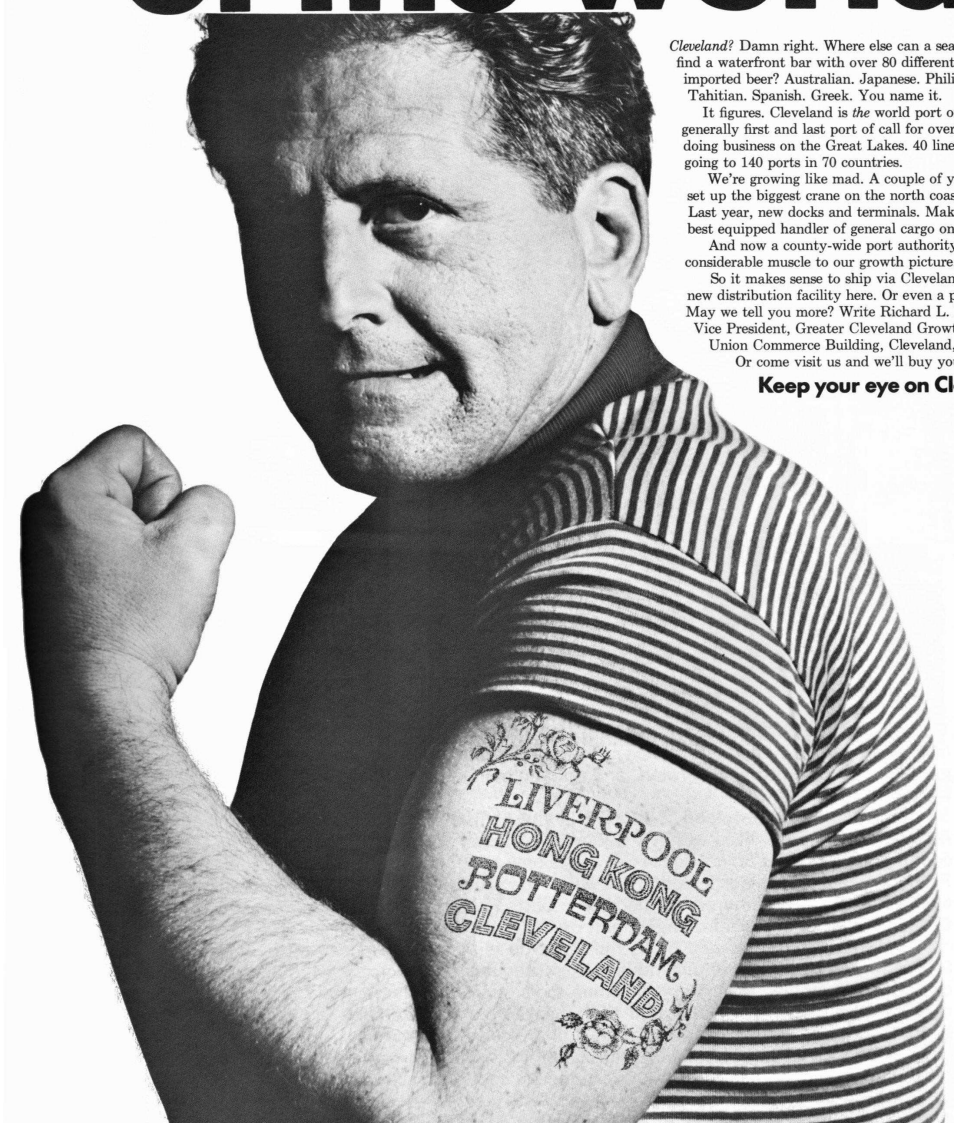
The emergence of a global economy has done injury to many urban areas located in what can be referred to as an economic fault line that stretches from Gary, Indiana to the Ruhr Valley... In the midst of all... that we're facing, cities are forced to become more self-reliant, more innovative, and more entrepreneurial (George Voinovich, Cleveland Mayor, 1980, quoted in Wilson and Wouters, 2003: 129)

For Voinovich and his successors, Michael White, Jane Campbell and Frank Jackson, pump-priming the downtown and waterfront became a political priority, in the hope that it would bring people and investment (back) to the city. The 1984 *City Vision 2000 Plan* was honed and refined in the form of the 1988 *Cleveland Civic Vision Downtown Plan*. Leaving aside the specifics, emerging out of these was a clear emphasis on the promotion of 'large-scale retail, office and hotel development, entertainment and sports attractions

to attract tourists, and the physical modernization of the central business district'

(Keating, 1996, p. 192).

Great seaports of the world



Cleveland? Damn right. Where else can a seaman find a waterfront bar with over 80 different kinds of imported beer? Australian. Japanese. Philippine. Tahitian. Spanish. Greek. You name it.

It figures. Cleveland is *the* world port on Lake Erie, generally first and last port of call for overseas freighters doing business on the Great Lakes. 40 lines going to 140 ports in 70 countries.

We're growing like mad. A couple of years back we set up the biggest crane on the north coast of the U.S.A. Last year, new docks and terminals. Making us the nation's best equipped handler of general cargo on the Great Lakes.

And now a county-wide port authority which adds considerable muscle to our growth picture.

So it makes sense to ship via Cleveland. To set up a new distribution facility here. Or even a plant. May we tell you more? Write Richard L. DeChant, Vice President, Greater Cleveland Growth Association, Union Commerce Building, Cleveland, Ohio 44115.

Or come visit us and we'll buy you a beer. Any kind.

Keep your eye on Cleveland

Fig 2. Great seaports of the world: A promotional advertisement for the Port of Cleveland, 1970

Source: Port of Cleveland Information Inc. (1970, p. 47)

In assembling these plans the experiences of a number of other cities were referenced. At the time Baltimore was *the* model for waterfront redevelopment (Millsbaugh, 2003). It was a city with a waterfront and a port that was being talked and written about as having been successful. This 'model' consisted of a mix of leisure, residential and retail developments on the Inner Harbor, including its much vaunted festival marketplace. '[A]ided by the active promotional efforts of those who were central to the Baltimore experience' (S. Ward, 2006, p. 272), it became the model to which other US (and elsewhere in the world) waterfront cities aspired, and to which they compared their own experiences. The message for local governments and port authorities elsewhere would be to work in partnership with the private sector, to facilitate and help finance post-industrial private development on the waterfront. Its message was unashamedly neoliberal, and it could be argued that if the Baltimore model had not existed it would probably have been necessary to invent it, or more accurately to find another place that embodied these same values (Hoyle, 2000; S. Ward, 2008).

Cleveland was but one of a huge number of cities whose officials visited Baltimore's Inner Harbor to observe what was going on and who hosted visiting architects, developers and planners involved in the redevelopment of Baltimore's Inner Harbor (S. Ward, 2006, 2008). The substance of these various comings and goings was to hear about and to see what had been achieved in Baltimore. Visitors from Cleveland saw the model, quite literally in terms of the architectural projections and the realized revalorized built environment. They met with those who had been involved in the design and the delivery and sought to interpret and make sense of them in the context of the

various issues facing the Cleveland port and waterfront. These exchanges led to the development of the North Harbor Coast on Cleveland's downtown waterfront during the late 1980s to mid-1990s, a development that had more than a passing resemblance to Baltimore's Inner Harbor, unsurprisingly:

[T]he initial plan was just to create a destination on the downtown waterfront. That was creation of the physical North Coast Harbor. There was dredging there and creating a harbor. And it was very much based, without apologies, on Baltimore's Inner Harbor, I mean that was the model that was used... It was pretty much a direct steal (interview, City planner, Cleveland, October 2009)

The redevelopment of Cleveland's North Coast Harbor in the 1990s, much like Baltimore's Inner Harbor, focused on lakefront tourist attractions – noticeably the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Great Lakes Science Center and the redeveloped Cleveland Browns football stadium (see Figure 3). Echoing the rhetoric surrounding the Baltimore 'model' it was argued that these attractions would help foster a tourist industry that never previously existed (outside of the Cleveland Brown's home games) and give residents and visitors something to go to the downtown waterfront for outside of their working duties (S. Ward, 2006).

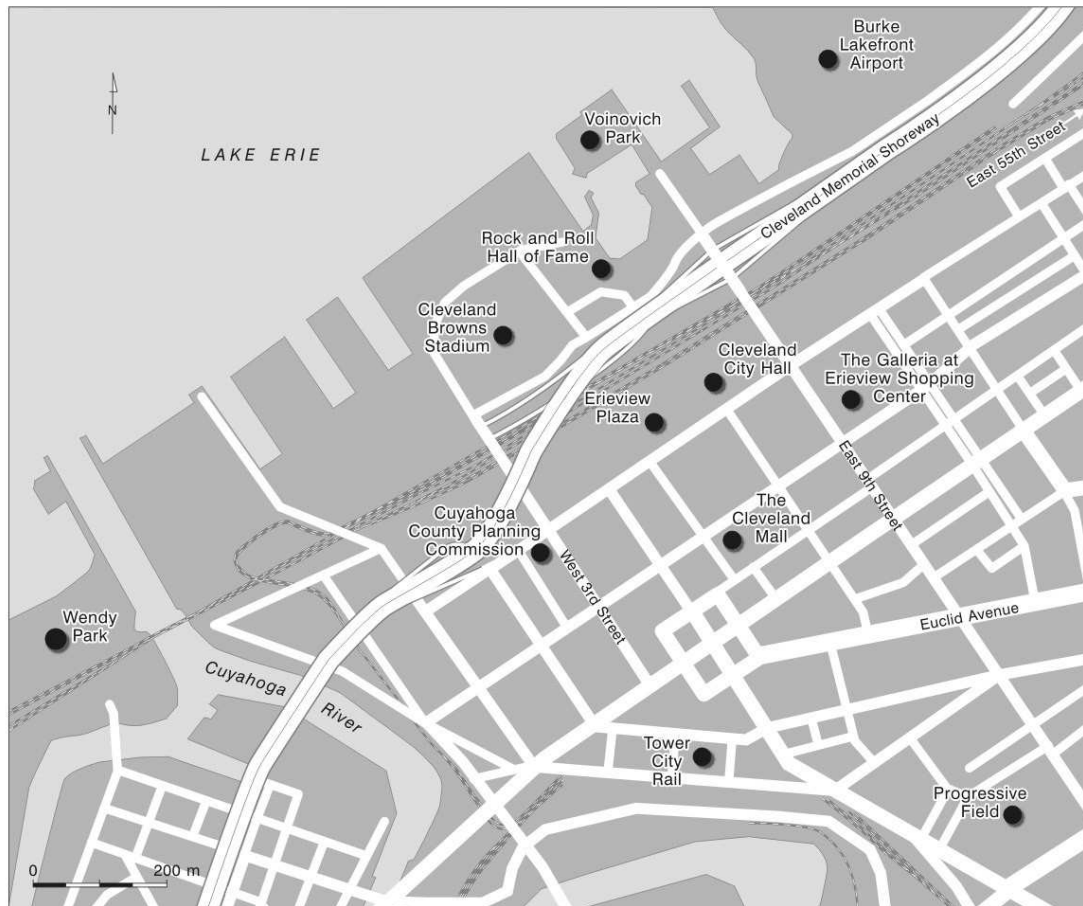


Fig 3. The Port and downtown Cleveland on Lake Erie.

Nevertheless, these attractions soon came to be seen as enclosed islands of day-time vibrancy in a sea of rarely-used and fragmented outdoor spaces – something, as Cleveland’s local politicians and policy makers would commonly stress, that Baltimore’s Inner Harbor and other places successfully avoided:

We’ll have events there, you know where thousands of people will come down to the lakefront. But on typical day someone is going to the Rock Hall or they are going to the Science Center or they are going to a Browns game or they are not there at all. They are certainly not out there strolling and in Baltimore, Chicago,

San Francisco and Boston, people go down to the waterfront just because it is a cool place to be. And they walk around, maybe they have a meal, and they don't do that in downtown Cleveland because we are not quite there yet in terms of filling that space with the kind of small scale attractions that make it the kind of place you want to be instead of a building you want to go inside of. We [need to] ... mak[e] it a real full-fledged place (interview, City planner, Cleveland, October 2009)

In 1996 the then Mayor, Michael White, formed a task force to re-visit and update the *City Vision 2000 Plan*. This Civic Vision group, led by Joseph T. Gorman, a member of *Cleveland Tomorrow*, a group of fifty seven CEOs of the wider region's major firms (which would subsequently become part of the *Greater Cleveland Partnership*), met a number of times over the next two years. Much to the angst of many local activists and commentators, however, these meetings occurred in a 'shroud of secrecy' (Chakalis *et al.*, 2002, p. 91). Only late in the day, in early 1998, were a couple of 'public' meetings held. And then, in May 1998, the *Civic Vision 2000 and Beyond* was launched by the Mayor. It contained few surprises. The plan was a local variation on the standard model that continues to dominate downtown and waterfront developments (Marshall, 2001). The city had learnt from what had worked in Baltimore, but its reference points were now more varied. So, not surprisingly, its most high-profile proposals were a new convention center and hotel, an aquarium, a relocated Crawford Museum of Transportation, a transit center, the redevelopment of the Euclid Avenue corridor and the building of almost ten thousand residential units.

Within Cleveland opposition was fierce. Its opponents argued that very few people had been consulted in the drawing up of the plan. It was undemocratic. Other,

alternative plans were subsequently launched, the most high profile of which was that unveiled by the county commissioners. In the most part ignoring the expressions of concern and disquiet, in July 2000 the Mayor re-launched his earlier plan:

White's plan, rolled out at a press conference in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, evoked visions of countless families enjoying themselves on a full 85 acres surrounding the North Coast Harbor. Families riding a Ferris wheel. Families strolling along a public promenade. Families taking charter boat tours. Cleveland families. Tourist families. All manner of families seemed ready to jump – picnic baskets in hand – right out of the architectural renderings and into the realm of possibility (Marino, 2000, n.p.)

Images of Chicago and, in particular, Navy Pier, adorned the press conference and littered the accompanying development proposal (VOA, 1999). It was no surprise to hear that Mayor White was being aided by the Chicago architects VOA whose portfolio included the co-designing of the redeveloped Navy Pier. For White, Navy Pier, like Baltimore's Inner Harbor earlier, showed that city waterfronts could be more-than-industrial, family-friendly playgrounds (J.M. Smith, 2005). They could be 'fun' (S. Ward, 2006). Built on an underutilized pier which had had a variety of transient uses since its construction in 1916, from Navy training base to university campus, Navy Pier was re-opened in the mid-1990s. Perhaps most eye-catching to White was that Navy Pier, like Baltimore's Inner Harbor, attracted millions of visitors each year – 9.1 million people visited Navy Pier in 2000 (J. M. Smith, 2005). For White this 'carnavalesque' redevelopment would 'take the [Cleveland] Great Lakes Expedition of the 1930s to a new level' (City of Cleveland, 2001, p. 1). As part of the process of comparison a

number of senior staff from the Mayor's office, together with senior officials from the Port Authority went on a study tour to Navy Pier in the summer of 1999 (Marino, 2000). City and county stakeholders were further animated by this latest plan. The choice of Chicago and its newly redeveloped Navy Pier also drew on the most common lay comparison made in the city. As two local officials explained, to reference and to compare Cleveland to Chicago was to reinforce a popularly held view in the city:

Cleveland often looks towards Chicago because it is Midwestern, it is on a lake. It is just bigger. In part because of its size it has been more successful... we look to Chicago for the use of the lakefront (interview, City planner, Cleveland, October 2009)

Particularly Chicago because when [Cleveland] people go there they are like 'this is Cleveland on steroids you know' (interview, Cleveland Waterfront Coalition member, November 2009)

Despite the attempts by the White administration and VOA to place a lay comparison at the centre of the strategy, the Chicago referents – most noticeably the planned centre-piece Ferris Wheel – were too crudely 'transplanted' for some. On top of this, political infighting at City Hall over who should oversee the planning process led to a political impasse (interview, ex-City planner, Cleveland, September 2009).

In this territorial context it is perhaps not surprising that it was only with a change of Mayor that things began to move on the redevelopment of the waterfront. Mayor Jane Campbell's *Connecting Cleveland: The Lakefront Plan* was launched and consulted

on in 2002 and 2003. This was an altogether different kind of document. Public consultation was centre stage, and there were four rounds of meetings. *Cleveland Lakefront Partners* was formed – an alliance of the *City of Cleveland*, *Cleveland Neighborhood Development Corporation*, *Cleveland Tomorrow* and the *Greater Cleveland Growth Association*. This organization worked with the Port Authority to produce the document. Over a hundred meetings took place, attracting over 5,000 people, leading to what was claimed to be ‘a community consensus for the future of Cleveland’s lakefront’ (City of Cleveland, 2002, p. 1).

The final Lakefront Plan was adopted in December 2004, and was known locally as *The Waterfront District Plan*. It spoke of bringing people to the lakefront, creating a walkable and cyclable lakefront, joining up a fragmented and often fenced off lakefront, re-connecting the waterfront to the city, and, perhaps most revealingly, ‘capitaliz[ing] on its special public assets’ (City of Cleveland, 2006, n.p.). It was not confined to the North Coast Harbor site but would be city-wide, incorporating eight miles of Cleveland’s waterfront. The port still had a place in the plan but it was to be complimented by integrated green spaces and new residential and commercial development. While its assembling had been more inclusive, involving a number of members of the public, in reality it did not constitute a significant departure from its many predecessors. Mayor Campbell’s loss to Frank Jackson in the mayoral election in 2005, together with the various disagreements amongst the different territorial stakeholders in the city and region, meant that the plan stalled for a few years. However, it did set the parameters for the 2009 plan, to which this paper now turns.

CLEVELAND'S WATERFRONT: ASSEMBLING THE 2009 PLAN

Following the change of mayor, the Port Authority took the lead in keeping discussion going about the future redevelopment of the waterfront. It appointed Adam Wasserman, fresh from his redevelopment experience in Hull, England, to lead the redevelopment as its new President and CEO. It hired the global consultants URS at a cost of \$1.3 million to study the sites for a possible port relocation (URS, 2008). This compared eight possible relocation sites. It came to the same conclusion as *The Waterfront District Plan*. The port should be relocated to East 55th street (just north east of Burke Lakefront Airport). This recommendation was approved by the Cleveland City Planning Commission in early 2008. Concurrently the Port Authority also commissioned Martin and Associates to assess the future of container shipping on the Great Lakes more widely. They had done something similar for Pittsburgh earlier in the decade.

Together these two reports and the references they made to elsewhere gave extra local impetus to producing a new plan for the Cleveland waterfront and port. They witnessed the beginning of a new development phase, with even great emphasis given to bringing together actors of different geographical reach into dialogue over its future. Community consultation and the local public and private sectors alone were understood not to possess the know-how to deliver a redeveloped waterfront. As a result, a number of actors situated elsewhere were brought to Cleveland in this period. Three groups predominated. First were the architects at Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn (EE&K) who won the tender to 'masterplan' the lakefront site. According to the Port Authority (2009, p. 1), EE&K were chosen by a committee comprised of public and private actors because they 'best matched the project's vision for a mixed-use pedestrian friendly space that maximizes Lake Erie's recreational amenities'. EE&K, as nationally-recognized architects based elsewhere and having been involved in the redevelopments of Battery

Park City in New York and the Inner East Harbor in Baltimore, were seen to bring experience and knowledge, or what Söderström (2006, p. 555) terms ‘cultural and artistic surplus value’. The company’s reputation, based largely on an expanding portfolio, was also seen as a guarantee (of sorts) to potential investors who would be told of EE&K’s successes elsewhere (if they were not already aware). Second were a group of international consulting firms, PA Consulting, Rebel Group and Kahr Real Estate, which were commissioned by the Port Authority to write *Cleveland Waterfront Market: Demand and Development Options* which sought to ‘show what is possible in Cleveland, and provide practical lessons of how this can be achieved’ (PA Consulting *et al.*, 2009, p. 4). Again, it was their reputations derived from work elsewhere that secured them a role in shaping the Cleveland development process. Third were a group of three high-profile actors who were keynote speakers at a prominent forum at the Cleveland’s Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs entitled *Transforming Cleveland by building a worldclass waterfront*. This was hosted by the City, the Port Authority, the Cleveland Foundation, the Urban Land Institute and the Downtown Cleveland Alliance. The speakers were Tom Murphy (former Mayor of Pittsburgh), Juan Alayo (Director of Development Planning in Bilbao) and David Taylor (UK based redevelopment consultant) who each spoke about their ‘hands-on’ experience of redeveloping waterfronts. This event constituted the kind of ‘micro space’ (Larner and Le Heron, 2002) that other studies have shown to be important in the making mobile of certain ‘models’ (McCann, 2011, McCann and K. Ward, 2010, Cook and Ward, 2012).

While the insights and expertise from afar were certainly celebrated, there was a need and a desire to bring these extra-local actors into a dialogue with those with localized knowledge and power. EE&K, for instance, teamed up with Cleveland-based architects Van Auken Akins, Columbus-based architects Moody Nolan, as well as a number of other consultants to develop the 2009 Masterplan. It was not only about

responding to the implicit requirements of the City and Port Authority to have local minority-run (gender or ethnicity) architects; it was also about gaining local knowledge and legitimacy:

[C]oming from out of town, they don't know anything about the city. They don't know anything about the history of the city, the politics of the city, you know, all the people that have been involved in all of the planning. So I think it is really helpful for them for [someone] to say, 'today we are just going to meet with so-and-so, tomorrow we have a board meeting with this guy'... Giving them the background, it is all about Cleveland. They did Battery Park, they did Baltimore. They don't want it to be about any other waterfront but Cleveland, so they need someone from Cleveland showing them [around] (interview, architect #1, Cleveland, October 2009)

Conversation, exchanges, and dialogue between between EE&K, PA Consulting and the local architects, public bodies and a narrower range of public and private stakeholders was a continuing feature during the course of 2009. Telephone calls and emails flowed in and out of Cleveland, while meetings and conferences provided opportunities for stakeholders to meet face-to-face. Amid this trans-local dialogue, the Final Masterplan was finalized in September 2009 (Figure 4). At its centre was the planned creation of a 200 acre port, relocated from the site adjacent to the Cleveland Brown's stadium down to East 55th street (just north east of Burke Lakefront Airport, see Figure 3). The plan 'envision[ed] an urban village along the waterfront' (Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority *et al.*, 2009, p. 5). Focusing on the downtown waterfront, it prescribed a network of new mixed-used buildings and streets, 'pedestrian oriented but auto convenient to and from all points on the site' (*ibid.*, p. 3). It was to be

punctured by a series of green ‘pockets’ and squares with an extended promenade along Lake Erie. For Stanton Eckstut, a principal architect at EE&K, the emphasis was on creating ‘iconic experiences, not iconic buildings’ (quoted in Litt, 2009, n.p.).

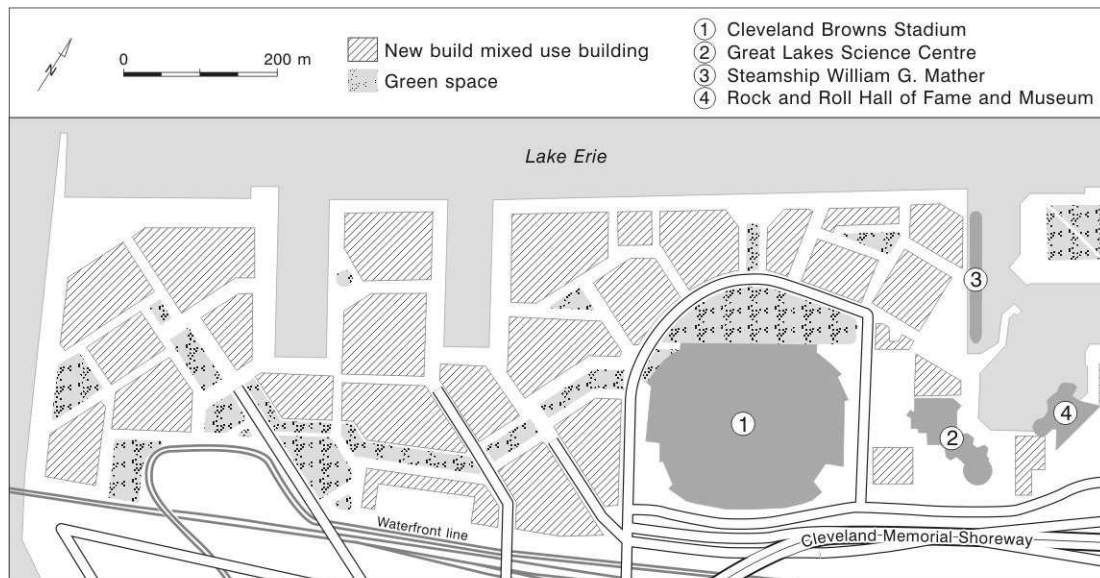


Fig 4. The proposed downtown waterfront in the 2009 Masterplan

As part of the various activities involved in the assembling of the 2009 Plan, relational comparisons with cities elsewhere were frequently drawn upon in a number of ways we discuss here. The first was in the form of a temporal comparison (Nijman, 2007). Cleveland was situated as *lagging behind* other cities in terms of its economic and social profile, its competitiveness, and, perhaps most importantly, its past history of learning from other cities. This reinforced the more long-standing framing of the Cleveland political economy. Decisions to create a Port Authority during the 1960s, plans for a conference center in the 1980s, and the most current plans to create an engaging, walkable waterfront, to name but a few, have all been couched in claims – inside and outside of the city – that Cleveland was being left behind; it was failing to learn from other North American cities who had faced similar challenges:

We are so far behind now that a port authority is the only way to get ahead...

The city just hasn't shown the imagination required (Steamship agent, quoted in Blossom and Shelton, 1965, n.p.)

When compared with such places as Chicago, Toronto and Baltimore, with inviting waterfronts increasingly at the heart of civic life, Cleveland falls short (Litt, 2001, n.p.)

A second way in which relational comparisons were present in assembling the 2009 strategy was in and through the use of spatial reference points. Cleveland was frequently represented as displaying the kinds of *problems common* in other North American cities – often in terms of declining levels of port activity and city-wide investment, redundant waterfront land, shrinking tax revenues, and ‘white flight’. In addition, those cities that had (seemingly) successfully addressed their problems were represented as being ones from which Cleveland could learn. New York’s Battery Park City and Baltimore’s Inner Harbor (once again) became the dominant points of reference, not simply because they were deemed to be successful and appropriate waterfront regeneration sites, but also because EE&K also helped masterplan these sites. It was claimed that the aim was to learn from these examples not simply copy from them, as Stanton Eckstut noted in a presentation at the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs forum:

We do rely on precedents, meaning we are not coming in to think about reinventing the wheel. There is much to learn certainly from Cleveland as Mayor Murphy has pointed out, but also from other places in the world. We would not

ever be copying them, we are not ever going to duplicate, but we can certainly learn and interpret.

As well as using qualitative narratives of success, failure, transferability and opportunity, quantitative measures were frequently drawn upon. This is perhaps most evident in *Cleveland Waterfront Market: Demand and Development Options* (PA Consulting *et al.*, 2009). In great detail it explored ten examples of waterfront redevelopment elsewhere from which Cleveland should learn and against which their plans should be compared. Echoing and expanding upon existing reference points in Cleveland, these were Hafen City (Hamburg), Kop van Zuid (Rotterdam), Abandoibarra (Bilbao), Euralille (Lille), Harbor East (Baltimore), South Street Seaport (New York City), Bellingham (Washington State), Millennium Park (Chicago), Three Rivers Park (Pittsburgh) and the singular Global South case study, Victoria and Alfred Waterfront (Cape Town). While space means we are unable to go into the specifics of each comparison, in general terms as well as drawing upon qualitative ‘tales of transformation’ via short descriptions of successful schemes, quantitative data – notably property values over time, costs, project durations, development sizes, unit numbers, and land use percentages – dominated the report. This was used to compare the different examples with that of Cleveland. Together these data were used to support the report’s main recommendation that, like many of these case studies, the ‘Port should develop a human-scale, vibrant, mixed-use waterfront neighborhood that brings downtown Cleveland to the water’s edge, while also bringing water users to the city through water-based activities’ (*ibid.*, p. 4).

CONCLUSION

I mean I am... quite sensitive... because New York is deemed as a very different kind of place that the rest of the country and it is really different... You have to be careful... you have to be sensitive... You have to be careful not to say ‘you have to be like Battery Park City’ because that is not the point of our comparisons (interview, architect #2, Cleveland, December 2009)

This paper ends by making five points. The first point is that over successive decades the Cleveland public have seen waterfront plans come and go. They were not alone. Many other North American and Western European ports have attempted to revalorize their waterfronts in an effort to kick-start faltering economies (Malone, 1996; Marshall, 2001). The difference was that some US some cities (i.e. Baltimore, Boston, Chicago and New York) were understood by some to have been ‘successful’, in terms of creating a waterfront spectacle that could seemingly attract new post-industrial investment to the area. Cleveland’s waterfront was not attracting such capital, being one of a number of cities worldwide that has struggled to turn around their economies.

While the history of waterfront redevelopment in Cleveland is sprinkled with minor successes – such as the establishment of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and a number of other prestige consumption-based facilities – its waterfront, for the local elites (and the public), remains disconnected, grimy, broken up and a place people would rather avoid. Successive mayors have been unable to deliver on plan after plan after plan. The end of 2009 saw further frustrations and barriers. Adam Wasserman resigned by ‘mutual consent’ as President and CEO from the Port Authority. Following this, it was announced in the summer of 2010 that the Port Authority was no longer seeking to

relocate the port to East 55th Street (just north east of Burke Lakefront Airport) (Cleveland Cuyahoga County Port Authority 2010), and instead was commissioning further consultancy reports to initiate a ‘comprehensive review of its business’ (ibid., p. 1). Somewhat symbolically the Port Authority’s [yourfutureport.com](#) website was shut down soon afterwards. After the various plans, the influx of consultants, the numerous relational comparisons elsewhere, and the public funding that accompanied this, a clear future for the waterfront remains elusive.

Second, the redevelopment of Cleveland’s waterfront should also be understood with reference to those officials based elsewhere tasked with envisioning and delivering a renaissance on the waterfront. Different sorts of consultants – architects, economists, engineers and planners – have been involved. In some cases these actors have visited the city, flying in and giving seminar or talks, tailoring their place-specific narratives to the (perceived) needs of the ‘local’ audience. In other examples they have been more centrally involved in fine-tuning the redevelopment plans, as architects or real estate developers. Working alongside local actors with political clout and local ‘expertise’, the consultants were understood to have accrued reputational capital through redeveloping waterfronts and downtowns elsewhere. While this is not without historical precedence, the current neo-liberal urban condition is one in which a set of consultative industries have grown dealing in the trans-urban movement of models and policies. This sets it apart from the past (Peck and Theodore, 2010b).

Third, the case of Cleveland reaffirms that “‘local’ policy development now occurs in a self-consciously comparative... context’ (Peck 2003, p. 229). Comparisons to other cities have been embedded within the longer history of planning Cleveland’s waterfront. Cleveland has been positioned as lagging behind other cities as a means of legitimizing a particular future development trajectory: a form of temporal comparison.

It has been situated as a city facing issues similar to those faced by the likes of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago and New York: a form of spatial comparison. These sorts of comparison and the technologies that make them possible (and probable) have been important in the case of Cleveland, and other studies suggest this is illustrative of a more general trend (McCann and K. Ward 2010, Robinson 2011). So, while the 2009 Masterplan claimed that it will bring people ‘back to the downtown – by offering them something that does not exist anywhere else’ (Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority *et al.*, 2009, p. 3), this paper has argued that its assembling has by no means been exclusive to Cleveland and has involved drawing upon and referencing all sorts of bits of elsewhere.

Fourth, the reports produced in the last few years as part of the redevelopment process exemplify how in many ways in recent years ‘the global has become more knowable by placing the experiences and performances of [other cities] into quantitatively and qualitatively encoded proximity’ (Larner and Le Heron, 2002, p. 417). In and through the process of translation, cities appear to have been shepherded into line, the unknown rendered both knowable and comparable. Urban complexity has been reduced to a series of numbers, stories, tables and images, bringing into comparative co-existence territories from around the world. As with the other relational comparisons drawn upon, they opened up a range of possibilities for the future of Cleveland, as well as closing down some others.

Fifth and finally, the case of Cleveland and its material and discursive connections and comparisons with places elsewhere show that urban studies needs to take seriously the ways in which blueprints, expertise, ideas and knowledge, not to mention, finalized ‘models’ are mobilized through trans-local circuits, networks and webs. This is as much about friction, fixity, and mutation in motion as it is about a smooth and

frictionless surface over which ‘models’ are moved. This is no intellectual argument for a frictionless world! So, it is important to pinpoint the actors involved, the multiple discursive frameworks through which cities are compared to other cities, the disputes and struggles involved, and the very real territorial implications of these mobile policies. This should not simply be limited to studies of waterfront development – important as they are – but to a whole variety of urban policy domains from crime to transportation, health to economic development. For if we are to continue to study the territorial politics of the city it is important we reflect on what (and where) goes into the making up of the ‘urban’ in urban politics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Leverhulme Trust, in the form of a 2005 Philip Leverhulme Prize, financed the researching and writing of this paper. We owe a debt of thanks to all of those who we spoke to, or interviewed, during this project, which is part of a wider program of research (www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/geography/research/urbanfutures/). We acknowledge the supportive comments of the editor of Urban Geography, Elvin Wylie, that of the editors of this special edition, Colin McFarlane and Jennifer Robinson, and those of the two reviewers. The project is an equal, two-way collaborative effort and all papers are authored alphabetically. Responsibility for the arguments here are ours.

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